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**STUDENTS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A STUDY OF STUDENTS AND
THEIR DEVELOPMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

by

Diamond Bolden

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education

at
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July 18, 2018

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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Abstract

Diamond F. Bolden

STUDENTS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A STUDY OF STUDENTS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS 2017-2018

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

The primary purpose of this study was to explore assess student sexual identity development on college students, in particular sophomore, junior, and senior students at Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ in the spring 2018 semester. The study also investigated the impact of demographic factors and other variables such as gender, ethnicity, and social life. The instrument used to assess students' anxiety levels and attitudes toward sexual orientation was adapted from two surveys used in previous studies, one about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) and gender development, as well as student anxiety. It was assessed with survey questions created by me and influenced by the *Campus Climate Survey for LGBTQ Issues (2012)*. Anxiety was assessed with the *Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7)* scale. The 7-item anxiety scale, the GAD-7, is a useful tool with substantial validity for identifying probable cases of GAD. Data analysis suggest that selected sophomore, junior, and senior students reported being comfortable around LGBTQ individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation. In regard to student experiences students reported to have a positive experience at Rowan University with policies and practices as it related to sexual orientation.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In today's higher education institutions, the role of the traditional and nontraditional student is vastly changing. This is due to the fact that social influences create stressors for students, especially young adults. As students are in the process to perform efficiently through their personal student development, many may be experiencing self-discovery through sexual identity development. This can include coming out to society, gender expression, and how it affects themselves as students. Though many institutions are working on creating safe environments for students to express themselves and their sexual orientation, many institutions experience hardship. A result of this hardship can potentially be students going through a negative phase of sexual identity development and experience: depression, anger issues, and most commonly, anxiety. The effect of anxiety on college students has a negative impact on the students. As a result, students do not perform productively in school (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). In regard to my study, the history of anxiety among higher education students is increasing in propensity with serious consequences for students while developing their sexual orientation.

Statement of the Problem

There is an intense connection between institutional environments and student success. Over the past few decades, collegiate curriculums have increased attempts to create diverse and inclusive environments for students in order to increase student performance and student development. These ethical and value positions are reflected in institutional mission statements, classroom policies, and other processes among

administrative directives. Students who attend a higher education institution are not only determined to educate themselves but are also trying to fulfill their own personal development. Holding students accountable to succeed in their education can be stressful, and any negative influences among a higher education institution can injure that process. Therefore, it is important for institutions to create safe environments for all students to succeed.

As diversity increases at higher education institutions, the greater the need in changes to occur. In particular to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, being able to feel comfortable within their sexual orientation and self-identity is important. That is due to students going through the process of sexual identity development, and higher education institutions today are making changes to accommodate them. Issues that may arise for this sample of university students can include bullying, low self-esteem levels, and acts of negligence. Emotions run high and students may not know how to cope with stress and anxiety. It is important for these students to be educated on ways to prevent and endure stress in order to succeed. If these issues become consistent and no change occurs, the retention rates of students at various institutions may suffer.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess student sexual identity development at a higher education institution and how a student's sexual orientation impacts this process. This includes students who were enrolled in a variety of programs such as business, engineering, and international languages. The study also investigated variations

that can impact anxiety levels to increase or decrease stress. Of related interest was learners' racial identity, sexuality, awareness, and family style.

Significance of the Study

This study acknowledges an important population in the field of higher education. Educators have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of adult learners to limit their anxiety, so they may be successful academically and socially. Therefore, this study focuses on the sexual identity development of students and how associated variables associate with these results. The data from this study may then help educators find solutions to the impact of student safety and LGBTQ Awareness.

Assumptions and Limitations

Since the research was conducted through a survey, it is assumed that the subjects provided truthful answers to questions or statements. The population sample chosen for this study consisted of selected students at Rowan University during the spring 2018 semester. Attempts were used to contact students that lived in residential halls and apartment areas, in particular the Rowan Boulevard Apartments, due to the fact that the sample was conveniently available. As I worked on campus, all of the students were accessible on a daily basis and were able to receive information from me to participate. Unfortunately, because many of the students knew me, this may have caused researcher bias within the study. There is an assumption that majority of the students within the Rowan Boulevard Apartments were willing to participate in the study because I worked in the residential area they lived in.

Operational Definitions

1. Anxiety: (1) A state of being anxious. (2) An abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anxiety>). Within my study, students answered multiple questions that assessed their level of anxiety as a student.
2. Anxiety Disorder: Anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear, for the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The feelings can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships. There are several different types of anxiety disorders. Examples include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder. (<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>). The students in my study answered multiple questions that may have disclosed them as having an anxiety disorder.
3. Coping Strategies: Within my study, coping strategies refers to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. (<http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/research/psychosocial/coping.php>)
4. Higher Education: Education beyond the secondary level; Education provided by a college or university (<https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/higher%20education>). Students in my study were enrolled in a higher education program.

5. Non-Traditional Student: Within this study, non-traditional is to identify students who have personal and professional demands on their lives that make it challenging to meet their academic goals. This student meets at least one of the following criteria: has been out of high school for 4+ years at the time of first undergraduate registration has had at least a 2-year interruption in their undergraduate education is a veteran or active duty military service member, enrolled in an online bachelor's degree completion program, is pursuing post-baccalaureate studies, primarily in undergraduate courses, must take less than 12 credits due to significant non-academic commitments. (<http://ucc.rutgers.edu/get-started/define-nontraditional-student>)
6. Sexual Identity Development: The process of an individual identifying with a sexual orientation and discovering who they are attracted to, both romantically and sexually (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Within this study students were able to discuss their sexuality and if they were able to be open about it in a university setting.
7. Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation is about who a person's attracted to and want to have relationships with. Sexual orientations include gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, and asexual (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation>) Students were able to identify their sexual orientation through the surveys.
8. Social Norms: The rules of behavior that are considered acceptable in a group or society. People who do not follow these norms may be shunned or suffer some kind of consequence. Norms change according to the environment or situation and

may change or be modified over time (<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/social-norm-examples.html>). Within this study, students were able to identify which variables affected their education and personal growth and if it is perceived in society as the norm.

9. Student Development: Looks at how students' growth and development happen during the years they are attending college (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-student-development-theory.html>). In this study, students were able to answer questions in regard to their life as a student and if they are meeting their own expectations.
10. Traditional Student: Within the study, an individual who enrolls in college immediately after graduation from high school, pursues college studies on a continuous full-time basis at least during the fall and spring semesters, and completes a bachelor's degree program in four or five years at the university of their choice (http://eimirvic.kennesaw.edu/AnalyticStudies/Students_2004_Traditional_Nontraditional_Undergraduates.pdf).
11. Upperclassman: A member of the junior or senior class at Rowan University in the spring 2017 semester (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upperclassman>).

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about their views related to sexual orientation?

2. Is there a relationship between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation?
3. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students at Rowan University report about their experiences with policies and practices related to sexual orientation?
4. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about how they handle stress in their lives?
5. Is there a relationship between sexuality and how the students handle stress in their lives?

Overview of the Study

Chapter II of this report addresses the literature review for my topic of study. It includes a review of relevant, as well as current, articles from research conducted. The literature is summarized in sections and concludes with a theoretical perspective for the research study.

Chapter III provides a description of the study of methodology, which is how the study was conducted. It describes: the context of the study, a description of the population and sample, a description of the data collection instrument used, which was a survey, a description of the procedures used to gather the data, and a brief description of how the data were analyzed.

Chapter IV presents the results of this study. This was based off of the research questions that were included in Chapter I. The chapter provides a profile of the study subjects and summarizes results in table and narrative form.

Chapter V summarizes and discusses major findings from the research study. The findings relate to what was learned as well from the literature in Chapter II. A conclusion of findings for the research questions, as well as recommendations for practice and further research are provided.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Students who attend a higher education institution are not only determined to educate themselves but are also trying to fulfill their own personal development. Therefore, it is important for institutions to create safe environments for all students to succeed. The more diverse institutions become, the more changes need to occur. As for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, being able to feel comfortable with their sexual orientation and self-identity is important, and higher education institutions today are making changes to accommodate them. However, change does not come easy. Therefore, this topic of study is very important, for it impacts today's society of students both positively and negatively. Areas that greatly relate to students and sexual orientation include the history of diversity in higher education, general details of sexual orientation and development, and LGBTQ awareness.

Brief History of Diversity in Higher Education

During the colonial age in America, the purpose of education focused on young, White men to become preachers in the church. This opportunity was not provided to women, lower class citizens, or other minority groups. Colleges and universities between the time of 1865 and 1945 enforced social roles that were created by privileged individuals. Women endured discrimination from other students and administrators (Goodchild, 2008). African Americans and Native Americans were also neglected with educations and were directed to have vocational training for occupations. As for individuals who identified as LGBTQ, they were not in a social climate where institutions

were open to such diversity. However, the lack of opportunity getting into higher educational institutions was attributed to the arrival of new immigrants who were perceived as a threat to the White majority during this time (Wechsler, 2008).

According to Quiggin (2015), the most important asset to a higher education institution is reputation, and new minority groups such as LGBTQ students were perceived as a threat to all institutions. Within the early 19th century, students that were a part of a new group or perceived as a threat led to a decrease in student activities. The notion that minority groups affected the daily practices of cisgendered White students forced administrators of higher educational institutions to be afraid of their reputations being tarnished. Administrators perceived this issue as something controversial to address, therefore attempts to draft policies that refer to bullying as generic behavior was considered the best resolution (Quiggin, 2015).

The main concern by administrators for addressing minority students was parental concerns, for during this time period parents possessed traditional and religious perspectives that often clashed with anti-homophobia initiatives on higher education campuses (Walton, 2011). Despite this concern, a backlash from heterosexual students on college campuses was also a risk. According to Marcia (1966), young adults go through four statuses of nonlinear development for self-identity. As part of the first status, foreclosure, is the acceptance of parental values and directions into a individual's life. Due to most parent populations perceiving homosexuality as a sin, heterosexual students may also disengage from a higher education institution (Walton, 2011). Despite this information, Marcia (1966) believed the development of student identity to be normal among young adults, including college students. Students are more likely to

question and explore their identity than adults, a representation of the second status moratorium. Once this occurs, individuals will reach identity achievement and diffusion statuses (Marcia, 1966). Therefore, data about administrators indirectly addressing diversity issues deprived minority students of student development (Walton, 2011).

Masquerading the issue of discrimination towards LGBTQ students did not address the specific ways that certain children are continual targets of peer violence. Walton (2011) notes that parents who are not religious, as well as students that are like their parents, may also have objections to anti-homophobia initiatives. He argues that prevalent forms of bullying, including homophobia, have not drawn focused preventative action. Therefore, the goal of institutions should be to eliminate homophobia and transphobia (Walton, 2011). There is a duty and obligation of those with privilege to assist in making safe spaces to prevent homophobia (Allen, Bromdal, Quinilvan, Rasmussen, & Sanjakdar, 2017). Just because someone is different does not mean they are bringing a negative perception to an educational institution. This type of discrimination brought many college students to engage in social justice issues for demands and equal opportunities to education (Quiggin, 2015).

Student Development Among Higher Education Students

Opportunities for student development is a very important element for student success and should be promoted by higher education institutions (Erikson, 1959). Unfortunately, there is a minimal amount of research available on the student development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008). A national convenience sample of gay and lesbian students showed that students did not discover any relationships between stages of sexual

orientation identity and self-efficacy for transformational leadership (Dugan et al., 2008). From that study, gay men possessed a higher self-efficacy for using their influence in primarily gay and/or lesbian student organizations in comparison to heterosexual organizations. This same trend did not manifest for lesbians either (Dugan et al., 2008).

Many campus experiences that contributed to LGBTQ development used the leadership identity development model (Komives, Longenecker, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006) as their theoretical framework. It was discovered in recent studies that involvement in leadership and activism specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identity promoted the development of leadership identity (Dugan et al., 2008). Further research explored various patterns in relation to LGBTQ identity, involvement, and leadership, which contributed to the creation of a taxonomy. This has then been perceived as useful for understanding the interactions that shape LGBTQ student approaches. Not much further research has been discovered about the leadership experiences of LGBTQ students, yet some has been discovered in relation to gender (Dugan et al., 2008).

Literature on gender and leadership presents differing views for the involvement of female students and other male students (Dugan et al., 2008). Female involvement is perceived as best with interactions for students who attend a higher education institution. Females were also reported to have a higher score on theoretically derived, self-reported, leadership measures. As for male students, it was reported that males tend to have higher self-assessed gender leadership than their female peers. All of these data show conflicting

findings, which match the debate found in literature examining gender and leadership (Dugan et al., 2008).

Sexual Identity Development

Cass' model of sexual identity development illustrates the stages through which gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals move in a linear fashion (Cass, 1979). Though it may take a student a few years to complete all areas of growth, the model includes six stages. The stages are: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Cass' model is based on the assumption that sexual identity is acquired rather than inborn, which involves the interactions between individuals and environments (Cass, 1979). Cass' model also serves as a conceptual foundation when counseling LGBTQ adolescents by offering an option to assess which stage of development a student may be experiencing (Kearns, Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014). Though Kearns, Kukner, and Tompkins (2014) perceives Cass' model as reasonable, other researchers question this rationalization.

Since Cass' model was created, many critiques have been made about the model and the development of other models that may relate to sexual identity formation. A vast amount of these models address biological theories and sexual identities beyond homosexual and heterosexual individuals (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). The critiques of Cass' *Homosexual Identity Formation Model* address four main areas: (a) the limitation of a linear stage model, (b) the inadequate focus on only gay and lesbian identity development, (c) the lack of addressing differences between males and females as it pertains to sexual identity development, and (d) the lack of addressing aspects of racial

and ethnic identity in relations to the influence of sexual identity among individuals (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014).

According to Kenneady and Oswalt (2014), linear models have been perceived as constricting over the ages of humanity. As a result, only one identity tends to be acknowledged, without looking at the possibility of multiple identities that can apply to an individual (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). Similarly, research with women participants who were struggling with the identification of their sexual orientation found linear models did not fit in the development of many lesbians. As a result, no specific sequence can be generalized to the population of lesbians, and the order and timing of events prevented support for the stage model (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). Similar to lesbians, the stage model recognized that people who are gay may not progress through all of the stages or within sequential order. There is a great possibility individuals may regress or simultaneously attend to more than one stage at a time. More recent studies of non-heterosexuality identity development include a variety of social and environmental influences (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014).

A second limitation of Cass's model is the direct focus of gay individuals and lesbians (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). No research has explored how the Cass model may or may not fit other identities such as: asexuals, pansexuals, or heterosexuals. Research has shown differences between bisexual women and lesbians regarding identity development, as well as similar differences in gay and bisexual males. The purpose of the model is to be binary for both gender and sexual orientations, however some theorists advocate to remove the binary lens when considering these issues (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). It is important for educators to not make assumptions based on Cass and take the

time to understand that the process of identity may differ for a non-heterosexual who identifies as something other than a gay male or lesbian. Along with these issues is the third conflict of Cass' model, the assumption men and women develop sexual identities similarly. Research shows that nonheterosexuality identity development may be different for females and males. Women tend to have a more frequent display of self-identification in later years of age, but the same was not true for men (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014).

The fourth limitation of this model is that it does not accurately reflect the identity development of particular ethnicities (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). In many instances, racial and ethnic identity received the primary focus in the development of socially constructed identities. Other evidence exists that this identity compared with their sexual identity will predict life satisfaction (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). However, the majority of research related to identity development was conducted with White middle-class men. A study of Black, Latino and White youths found that Black youths reported less involvement in gay-related social activities. Black youth also reported less comfort with others knowing their sexual identity and disclosed that identity to fewer people than White youths (Mobley & Squire, 2015). Cass' model also does not address dual identity development. People who have multiple identities, such as a person who is female, black, and a lesbian, often encounter more challenges regarding identity development because the identities may conflict with each other. Research shows the integration of an ethnic and sexual minority identity is positively correlated with having higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, greater levels of life satisfaction, lower levels of psychological distress, and stronger social support networks (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014).

Social and Sexual Risk Factors for LGBTQ Students

Out of all of the new sexually transmitted infections in the universe, approximately three million adolescents are infected annually (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Data that reported cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea are highest among individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, affecting students who attend a higher education institution. In 2009, adolescents and young adults aged 13 to 29 accounted for 39% of all new human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Although all teenagers are at high behavioral risk for contracting STIs and HIV, sexual minority students, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer students, are disproportionately infected (Ertl & Quinn, 2015).

There are various sexual, social, and environmental factors that may contribute to sexual minority adolescents' increased risk for contracting HIV or other STIs (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Students who are being bullied for being a member of the LGBTQ community, as well as those perceived to be gay or gender nonconforming, have been found to be pervasive and severe. LGBTQ youth report experiencing homophobic harassment by school peers and occasionally administrators (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Such situations are often underreported, and therefore places students at risk for internalizing negative self-identity and homophobia. Unfortunately, these actions can lead to emotional distress, influence decision making around sexual behavior and substance use, anxiety, and depression. Other social factors, including suicidal ideation are known social drivers of HIV and require increased attention during discussions of HIV risk among sexual minority adolescents (Ertl & Quinn, 2015).

LGBTQ students are at a higher risk of experiencing social anxiety than heterosexual students (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Social anxiety has been listed as one of the issues that drive many students to perform in negligent acts. This includes substance abuse, excessive use of alcohol, and vulnerability to psychiatric disorders (Roberson-Nay, Schry, & White, 2012). In a study with college undergraduate students, it was discovered that participants meeting diagnostic criteria for social anxiety disorder as well as those with subclinical social anxiety disorder symptoms, experienced more psychosocial impairment and other comorbid psychiatric disorders (Roberson-Nay et al., 2012). This was compared with students without social anxiety disorder symptoms, supporting conceptualization of a spectrum of social anxiety disorder impairments. Social anxiety also has been associated with alcohol problems and social isolation in young adults, which may contribute to the development of subsequent psychiatric simulations (Roberson-Nay et al., 2012).

This distress is also linked to numerous negative consequences including lower grade point averages and higher rates of attrition (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Therefore, it is very important for students who identify as LGBTQ to find social support in a higher education institution environment. The experiences and behavioral patterns established during adolescence can influence adolescent health, which can affect long-term health trajectories of LGBTQ young adults (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). Perceived stigmas and isolation associated with homosexuality can also influence developmental processes and social and sexual behaviors among LGBTQ youth. It is important to note that sexual attraction typically emerges in early adolescence, while sexual behavior and identity occurs during middle to late adolescence (Ertl & Quinn, 2015).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students are an invisible minority among society (Kayler & Lewis, 2008). They tend to experience the same biological, cognitive, and psychosocial tasks of heterosexual students; however, they tend to struggle with an awareness of a minority sexual orientation. However, because LGBTQ students are struggling to define a sexual identity within a heterosexist society, they face a vast amount of challenges that their heterosexual peers do not (Kayler & Lewis, 2008). It is estimated that 10% of the population is lesbian or gay, and that most lesbian and gay people become aware of their sexual orientation during early adolescence. According to Kayler and Lewis (2008), research also suggests that gay persons experience an awareness of differences as early as age four. A study of lesbian and gay college students found that 37% of men and 17% of women knew they had a same-sex orientation by high school. Many negative emotional consequences are associated with being either an open or “in the closet” LGBTQ adolescent (Kayler & Lewis, 2008).

LGBTQ Awareness and Intervention

There are often times where students feel unsafe or in danger due to their open sexuality at a higher education institution. Within recent years, administrators and faculty that work at these institutions have been making more of an attempt to create safe environments for their students through classroom discussions, programming, and social outlets (Kearns, Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014). Acknowledging the concept of sociology of bullying has made many researchers question what it means to respond well to homophobia and transphobia (Pascoe, 2013). The phrase sociology of bullying addresses the concept of one’s actions and thoughts when they are in a situation of being

bullied. Should a victim react aggressively? Or should a victim educate their aggressor as an attempt to mediate the situation so it would not happen again?

According to Pascoe (2013), the concept investigates the potential of thinking about responsibility as relational. Therefore, research was conducted at institutions in Australia and New Zealand with culturally and religiously diverse student populations. These sites were recognized because diversity is a fundamental characteristic of effective education related to gender and sexuality (UNESCO, 2009). Many students approach adulthood while experiencing conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality and gender. However, these students may be receiving conflicting advice and feelings about what it means to respond to homophobia and transphobia. It is not only important to educate non-LGBTQ students about being inclusive and respectful to others, but also educate LGBTQ students on how to combat homophobia and transphobia at a higher education institution.

Other researchers such as Walton (2011) argue the importance of reconceptualizing bullying beyond behavior-based approaches. He believes that school policies are created to be generally safe, with policies that individualize school violence as moments of bullying. However, this judgement by institutions does not take into consideration broader social and political conditions that endorse bullying behaviors, such as the attitudes that are expressed as bullying. Walton (2011) also argues that homophobic bullying is pervasive but frequently unaddressed by administrators. As a further notation, it is also important to recognize that in addition to feeling unsafe, rural LGBTQ youth have been shown to experience more hostile climates than their urban counterparts (Kearns et al., 2014). This is due to rural LGBTQ students being restricted

by fewer resources and support systems, including a lower Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive anti-bullying policies took further time to achieve greatness, however it has vastly grown (Kearns, 2014). In order to create more awareness towards LGBTQ issues, individuals have taken the time to create training programs to create a safe space environment for LGBTQ students who attend a higher education institution (Kearns et al., 2014).

According to Taylor et al. (2011), the current bullying discourse does not often highlight the vulnerability of sexual minority youth. Research shows that over 75% of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer youth and 95% of Transgendered students do not feel safe at a higher education institution in comparison to the 20% of heterosexual students. According to the *First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools* (Taylor et al., 2009) homophobic and transphobic bullying are neither rare nor harmless, however they are perceived as major problems that institutions need to address. Many school board policies and curricula emphasize the human rights of the students and embrace diversity, however, LGBTQ students feel unsafe, insulted or harassed on a daily basis. LGBTQ youth experience a lot of homophobia and transphobia in schools, however they do not see any administrators or faculty in leadership positions breaking this type of discrimination (Taylor et al., 2011).

As a course of action, faculty at Saint Francis Xavier University created a two-part series to educate others on LGBTQ awareness and how to create a safe space (Kearns et al., 2014). The names of these programs are Positive Space I (PSI) and Positive Space II (PSII), a two to three hour workshop that have been integrated into a few of the mandatory education classes. This includes Sociology of Education and

Inclusion I, which was created to assist and promote pre-service teachers' understandings of and abilities to create safe spaces for LGBTQ youth (Kearns et al., 2014). Since 2009, this program has been used to discuss issues around power, privilege, and interlocking forms of oppressions. Positive Space features awareness building with a focus on language and terminology. Positive Space II focuses on becoming an ally, which gives various opportunities for administrators and faculty to witness and role play educators interrupting heteronormativity (Kearns et al., 2014).

The purpose of this program and following study was to explore the impact of the training program and to consider which practices are the best in order to build awareness and allies at a higher education institution. This program was also created to assist the acceleration of better learning communities for LGBTQ youth and allies at institutions (Kearns et al., 2014). The Positive Space Training program is very critical, for many future teachers are not prepared to address issues of homophobia and heterosexism inside and outside of the classroom. The purpose of this study was to assist students become activists who may help advance academics and social justice among higher education institutions (Kearns et al., 2014).

Many authors discuss how theories such as Cass' model of sexual identity development serves as an appropriate template from which school counselors can work directly with (Kearns, 2014). Students at each stage of sexual identity development can be acknowledged and evaluated accordingly, for there are many indirect services by school counselors that can be provided to LGBTQ students. The extent of developmental, emotional, and psychosocial challenges faced by LGBTQ adolescents is overwhelming and may be difficult for school counselors to understand without

conceptualizing the psychological and emotional struggles of these adolescents (Kearns et al., 2014). Counselors can also comprehensively examine the risk factors, stigmatization, and developmental issues facing LGBTQ students, offering practical interventions to aid school counselors to work effectively with students who attend a higher education institution (Bell & Thomas, 2007). Using Cass' (1979) model of sexual identity development as the theoretical framework, the benefits of support groups and strategies for eliminating institutionalized heterosexism are discussed, along with gaps within current research on LGBTQ adolescent issues and implications for future research.

According to Kearns et al (2014), in order to assist a student, a school counselor must not assume that an LGBTQ student wants to discuss issues related to her same-sex orientation. However, a LGBTQ student may express feelings of depression, isolation, or substance abuse issues as mentioned before. The counselor should consider the impact that stigmatization has on these emotional and behavioral issues, and be aware that students might present as heterosexual, though they may be questioning their sexual identity (Kearns et al., 2014).

Summary of the Literature Review

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) students have endured a vast amount of tribulation on their quest to attend a higher education institution. Not only that, but these students have paved the way for many individuals to succeed academically, professionally, and socially. However, there are still many issues LGBTQ students endure while attending these institutions. Many students still feel unsafe on campus environments, regardless if they are open about their sexual orientation or not. Many institutions promote safe, inclusive, and diverse environments for all students to

express themselves and succeed, however not all institutions are taking action against those who create a negative environment for LGBTQ students. Negative outcomes of these issues include social anxiety, depression and suicidal ideations. Understanding the phases of sexual orientation discovery, some students are comfortable taking action among themselves, while others may not. Therefore, the study that was conducted provided data involving student development and sexual orientation at a higher education institution.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of the Study

The study was conducted at a four year, research institution named Rowan University. The institution is located in Glassboro, New Jersey, located in the Gloucester County township of New Jersey. The New Jersey Department of Education (2017) listed the District Factor Group (DFG) for the township as “B,” based on the 2000 decennial Census data. The DFG is an approximate measure of a community’s socioeconomic status (SES) and is ranked from “A” to “J,” districts having the latter classification have the highest SES (“District Factor Groups, DFG, for School Districts,” 2017).

Since its beginnings in 1923, Rowan University is a comprehensive research university with campuses in Main Glassboro Campus, West Glassboro Campus, and Camden Campus. Rowan University has evolved from a teacher preparation college to a regional university that is ranked among the best public universities in the North by *U.S. News and World Report* (“The Official Web Site for the State of New Jersey,” 2017). Recent data shows an enrollment of 14,452 students (11,653 undergraduates, 1,985 graduates, and 814 professionals) from 31 states and 19 foreign countries and a minority enrollment of 28%. These students are provided the opportunity to choose from more than 80 bachelor's and 60 master's degree programs, five doctoral programs, and two professional programs. The university is one of just 56 institutions in the country with accredited programs in business, education, engineering, and medicine (“The Official Web Site for the State of New Jersey,” 2017).

Population and Sample Selection

The target population for this study was all traditional and nontraditional students who were classified as Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors during the 2017-2018 academic year in New Jersey. The available population was all traditional and nontraditional students who were classified as Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors who attended Rowan University, in Glassboro, NJ, Gloucester County. The population sample was selected students who majored in various programs such as: business, education, and multicultural languages. According to the Office of Residential Learning and University Housing, there were a total of 884 students located in Rowan Boulevard Apartments. The total sample size for this study was 484. This number was obtained utilizing a sample size calculator set at a confidence level of 95% with a 3% error rate. The desired sample size was 242 representing a response rate of 50%.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to assess students' anxiety levels and attitudes toward sexual orientation was adapted from two surveys used in previous studies, one about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) and gender development, as well as student anxiety. It was assessed with survey questions created by me. These survey questions were influenced by the *Campus Climate Survey for LGBTQ Issues* (2012). This survey was developed for students of the State University of New York at New Paltz for feedback for the institution to assess the attitudes and campus experiences of students and employees related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people and issues. Data were collected using questions created by the researcher that addressed the following broad themes: (a) opinions and attitudes about

homosexuality; (b) awareness of transgender people and issues; and (c) experiences and observations of LGBTQ-phobia on campus. For each question, the sample population was to fill-in one response circle to indicate the best answer. If there were more numbers than choices, they were instructed to ignore the extra response circles (for example: if Disagree=1, Neutral=2, and Agree=3, then mark response circles accordingly).

Anxiety was assessed with the *Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item* (GAD-7) scale. The 7-item anxiety scale, the GAD-7, is a useful tool with substantial validity for identifying probable cases of GAD. For validity, GAD self-report scale diagnoses were assessed with independent diagnoses made by mental health professionals, functional status measures, disability days, and health care use (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006). Principal component analysis of 15 items that includes the 8 depression items of the PHQ-8 and the 7 anxiety items of the GAD-7 indicated that the first 2 factors had a value greater than 1 (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006). For the scale, respondents used a Likert scale from 0-3, 0 representing not at all sure and 3 for nearly every day to answer 7 statements. These statements were: Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge, not being able to stop or control worrying, being so restless that it's hard to sit still, becoming easily annoyed or irritable, feeling afraid as if something awful might happen, and get discouraged (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006).

The two survey instruments (see Appendix A) were slightly altered for this study in order to better fit the objectives of the research questions. Since the primary purpose of this report was to investigate student sexual orientation and their safety at a higher education institution, the surveys used in this study focused on perspectives and self-reflected experiences rather than institutional issues. The two surveys influenced the

design of the final instrument used in this study. Only a few questions were taken directly from the *Campus Climate Survey for LGBTQ Issues* and the *Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7)*.

There are other interpretive questions used as well in this survey. Respondent's race/ethnicity, gender, year in college, student residential status, tutoring needs, presence at social events, friends, knowledge of LGBTQ issues and self-identification of sexual orientation were measured at the nominal level. Social class and level of safety attending a higher education institution was measured at the ordinal. Respondent's age and GPA were measured at ratio level. The instrument was determined to be valid by conducting a pilot test with five students prior to the research being conducted. A convenience sample of five students who reside in Rowan Boulevard Apartments were randomly selected to participate in the pilot test of this survey. Each student was given their own copy of the survey and was able to provide feedback to me on their experiences. All five of the subjects agreed that the survey contained easy questions to answer. One of the subjects did state it took them longer than the other subjects to answer questions because they were never asked some of the questions the survey did. The subjects were also very open to answering questions about their experiences with anxiety, as well as their sexual identity. Reliability was determined by using the Cronbach Alpha Test, determining that the internal consistency is acceptable. After accounting for sexual orientation awareness, LGBTQ issues awareness, comfortability using campus restrooms, and coping with stress, this scale has a reasonably strong coefficient of 0.7.

Data Collection

Permission was granted to distribute the survey to Rowan University students after the approval of the IRB submission (see Appendix B). The survey was administered in January 2018. An informational paragraph was at the beginning of each survey; and at the end of the survey was contact information for my thesis chair, Dr. Burton Sisco. Completed surveys were returned to me, the researcher, in person. There were no signed consent forms for this survey, and no identifying information was collected on the survey itself. All students were given 20 minutes to complete each survey. The survey was promoted to students through flyers approved by the IRB (see Appendix C) and emails (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The independent variables in this study included year in school, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Information for these variables was collected at the end of the questionnaire. The dependent variable was the student's levels of anxiety. These variations were explored using the three independent variables using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data analyzed using frequency tables and correlations was calculated using Spearman product-moment test. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, percentages, and measures of central tendency) were used to examine the data in regard to the research questions.

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of the Sample

The subjects for this study were selected from students who was classified as Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors during the spring 2018 semester. Of the 242 surveys distributed, all of them were completed and returned, yielding a return rate of 100%.

Table 4.1 contains demographic information about the subjects. Out of the students given the survey, 132 students identified as Sophomores, 74 students identified as Juniors, and 36 identified themselves as Seniors. More than half of the subjects (79.1%) currently maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher for the spring 2018 semester. A majority of the subjects identified as White (76.4%), leaving the rest of the subjects to identify as Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Other (23.6%). From the data collected, 83.1% of the subjects reported coming from Middle Class families, leaving 27 subjects identifying as Lower Class (11.2%) and 14 subjects to identify as Upper Class (5.8%).

In regard to sexual orientation, 62.8%, identified as heterosexual, whereas 37.2% of the students identified as gay, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or other (see Table 4.1). The subjects were between the ages of 19 and 47, with the majority (96%) being 22 or less years of age. There were 192 subjects who identified as a woman (53.3%), 91 men (37.6%), 8 transgenders (3.3%), 6 other (2.5%), 4 genderqueer (1.7%), 1 intersex (0.4%), and 1 transsexual (0.4%). Those who identified as other included: genderfluid, trans-nonbinary, and androgynous (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Demographic Information (N=242)

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
School Year		
Sophomore	132	54.5
Junior	74	30.6
Senior	36	14.9
Total	242	100
GPA		
0.0-2.0	9	3.7
2.1-3.0	55	22.7
3.1-3.5	82	33.9
3.6-4.0	96	39.7
Total	242	100
Race		
Black	27	11.2
White	185	76.4
Hispanic	14	5.8
Asian	3	1.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	1.2
Multiracial	9	3.7
Other	1	0.4
Total	242	100
Social Class		
Upper Class	14	5.8
Middle Class	201	83.1
Lower Class	27	11.2
Total	242	100
Age:		
23 or up	9	3.7
22 or under	233	96.3
Total	242	100

Table 4.1 (continued)

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Woman	129	53.3
Man	93	38.4
Transgender	8	3.3
Genderqueer	4	1.7
Intersex	1	0.4
Transsexual	1	0.4
Other	6	2.5
Total	242	100

Analysis of the Data

Research question 1. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about their views related to sexual orientation?

Subjects were given questions related to their views of sexual orientation, which is represented in Table 4.2. Data show that 88.8% of the sample stated support the right to same-sex marriage. In regard to subjects being comfortable around lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, 88% of subjects agreed that they felt comfortable in the same environment as them. Views related to LGBTQ individuals being treated with respect by faculty displayed that 63.3% of subjects believed this to be positive. Data show that 68.6% of subjects are comfortable around transgender individuals. Data show that 50% of subjects agreed that LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by peers. Subjects also reported that they believed homosexuality to be a choice by 66.1% (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Views Related to Sexual Orientation (N=242)
(DISagree=1, Neutral=2, Agree=3)

Variable	DISagree		Neutral		Agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I support the right to same-sex marriage. <i>M</i> =2.86 <i>SD</i> =0.396	5	2.1	22	9.1	215	88.8
I am comfortable around lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. <i>M</i> =2.83 <i>SD</i> =0.491	12	5.0	17	7.0	213	88.0
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty. <i>M</i> =2.58 <i>SD</i> =0.571	0	4.1	79	32.6	152	63.3
I am comfortable around transgender individuals. <i>M</i> =2.56 <i>SD</i> =0.688	27	11.2	49	20.2	163	68.6
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by peers. <i>M</i> =2.39 <i>SD</i> =0.669	25	10.3	96	39.7	121	50.0
Homosexuality is a choice. <i>M</i> =1.47 <i>SD</i> =0.725	160	66.1	47	19.4	33	14.5

An overall assessment of heterosexual subjects' views related to sexual orientation showed that 86.8% of heterosexual subjects support the right to same-sex marriage (see Table 4.3). In comparison to LGBTQ subjects' views, 93.4% of LGBTQ subjects support the right to same-sex marriage as well (see Table 4.4). An overall total of 86% of heterosexual students stated they felt comfortable around lesbian, gay, bisexual individuals, as 91.1% of LGBTQ subjects felt comfortable as well.

Table 4.3

Heterosexual Subjects Views Related to Sexual Orientation (N=152)
(DISagree=1, Neutral=2, Agree=3)

Variable	DISagree		Neutral		Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I support the right to same-sex marriage. <i>M</i> =2.84 <i>SD</i> =0.395	2	1.3	19	12.7	131	86.8
I am comfortable around lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. <i>M</i> =2.81 <i>SD</i> =0.494	7	5.0	14	9.0	131	86.0
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty. <i>M</i> =2.68 <i>SD</i> =0.507	3	2.0	41	27.0	106	71.0
I am comfortable around transgender individuals. <i>M</i> =2.49 <i>SD</i> =0.732	21	13.8	34	22.4	94	63.8

Table 4.3 (continued)

Variable	DISagree		Neutral		Agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by peers. <i>M</i> =2.43 <i>SD</i> =0.668	15	9.9	56	36.8	81	53.3
Homosexuality is a choice. <i>M</i> =1.57 <i>SD</i> =0.570	87	55.3	38	25.0	24	19.7

Table 4.4

LGBTQ Subjects Views Related to Sexual Orientation (N=90)
(DISagree=1, Neutral=2, Agree=3)

Variable	DISagree		Neutral		Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I support the right to same-sex marriage. <i>M</i> =2.90 <i>SD</i> =0.398	3	3.3	3	3.3	84	93.4
I am comfortable around lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. <i>M</i> =2.85 <i>SD</i> =0.487	5	5.6	3	3.3	82	91.1
I am comfortable around transgender individuals. <i>M</i> =2.70 <i>SD</i> =0.589	6	6.6	15	16.7	69	76.6
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty. <i>M</i> =2.42 <i>SD</i> =0.636	7	7.8	38	42.2	45	50.0
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by peers. <i>M</i> =2.33 <i>SD</i> =0.67	10	11.1	40	44.4	40	34.5
Homosexuality is a choice. <i>M</i> =1.25 <i>SD</i> =0.591	74	82.2	9	10.0	7	7.8

Research question 2. Is there a relationship between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation?

A Spearman correlation was conducted between subjects and their views on sexual orientation. Overall, data show that there is no correlation between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation. Only one positive correlation between sexual orientation and LGBTQ individuals treated with respect by faculty was discovered, for data showed that Sig. 2-tailed = 0.003, $p < 0.01$. This indicates a significant relationship between the variables (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Significant Correlation Between Sexual Orientation and Views Related to Sexual Orientation (N=242)

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty.	-0.190**	0.003

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research question 3. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students at Rowan University report about their experiences with policies and practices related to sexual orientation?

Subjects were given questions related to daily policies and practices, which are represented in Table 4.6. Overall, data show that students reported having a positive experience at Rowan University with their policies and practices. Data show that 94.2% of the sample stated they felt professors respected their preferred name and preferred

gender pronouns in educational settings. In regard to seeing the inclusion of sexual orientation in official university materials about diversity and multiculturalism, 69.4% of subjects agreed that the university promoted diversity. One discovery that was shocking was that 51.2% of subjects never took an initiative to attend an event or class relating to LGBTQ students, gender, and sexuality. More than half of the sample stated they were familiar (39.7%) and very familiar (21.4%) with LGBTQ issues. The highest involvement in an LGBTQ related initiative was 18.5% of the sample attending an LGBTQ orientated student event on campus (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Student Experiences with Policies and Practices Related to Sexual Orientation (N=242)

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Do you feel your professor(s) respect your preferred name and preferred gender pronouns?		
Yes	228	94.2
No	14	5.8
Total	242	100
Do you see the inclusion of “sexual orientation” in official university materials about diversity and multiculturalism?		
Yes	168	69.4
No	74	30.6
Total	242	100
During the past year have you done any of the following?		
Attended meeting at SJICR for sexual orientation	25	10.3
Attended LGBTQ oriented student event on campus	45	18.5
Took a class about gender	32	13.5
Took a class about sexuality	16	6.5
None of the above	124	51.2
Total	242	100
How familiar are you with LGBTQ issues?		
Very familiar	52	21.4
Familiar	96	39.7
Somewhat familiar	77	31.9
Not very familiar	12	4.9
Not familiar at all	5	2.1
Total	242	100
How comfortable are you using men only and female only campus restrooms?		
Very comfortable	185	76.4
Comfortable	16	6.6
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	32	13.2
Uncomfortable	3	1.2
Very uncomfortable	6	2.6
Total	242	100

Research question 4. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about how they handle stress in their lives?

Subjects were given six items related to handling stress in their lives, represented in Table 4.7. It is organized by how often a subject has been bothered by problems over the last two weeks prior to taking the survey, rated from not at all sure to nearly every day. When asked how often they were feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge over the last two weeks, 60% of subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days.” Subjects responded “nearly every day” or “over half the days” 48.4% of the time when asked if they were being so restless that it is hard to sit still. A total of 52.5% of subjects also responded “nearly every day” or “over half the days” when asked if they were becoming easily annoyed or irritable. When asked how often subjects get discouraged over the last two weeks, 53.3% of subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days.” A total of 41.3% of subjects responded “nearly every day” or “over half the days” when asked not being able to stop or control worrying. Subjects responded “nearly every day” or “over half the days” 35.2% of the time when asked if they were feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.

Table 4.7

*Views Related to Handling Stress (N=242)**(Not at all sure=1, Several days=2, Over half the days=3, Nearly every day=4)*

Variable	Not at all sure		Several Days		Over half the days		Nearly Everyday	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge. <i>M</i> =2.58 <i>SD</i> =1.082	57	23.6	45	18.6	88	36.4	57	23.6
Being so restless that it's hard to sit still. <i>M</i> =2.49 <i>SD</i> =1.071	53	21.9	72	29.7	62	25.7	55	22.7
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable. <i>M</i> =2.49 <i>SD</i> =0.986	47	19.4	68	28.1	87	36.0	40	16.5
Get discouraged. <i>M</i> =2.47 <i>SD</i> =1.043	58	24.0	55	22.7	86	35.5	43	17.8
Not being able to stop or control worrying. <i>M</i> =2.30 <i>SD</i> =1.021	63	26.1	79	32.6	63	26.0	37	15.3
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen. <i>M</i> =2.26 <i>SD</i> =0.841	42	17.3	115	47.5	65	26.9	20	8.3

Heterosexual subjects and LGBTQ subjects were given six items related to handling stress in their lives, represented in Tables 4.8 and 4.9. It is organized by how often a subject has been bothered by problems over the last two weeks prior to taking the survey, rated from not at all sure to nearly every day. When asked how often they were feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge over the last two weeks, 56.6% of heterosexual subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” and 56.8% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.” A total of 32.8% of heterosexual subjects also responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” when asked if they were becoming easily annoyed or irritable and 54.5% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.” When asked how often heterosexual subjects get discouraged over the last two weeks, 53.9% of subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” and 52.2% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.” Heterosexual subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” 36.9% of the time when asked if they were feeling afraid as if something awful might happen and 32.2% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.” Heterosexual subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” 31.6% of the time when asked if they were being so restless that it is hard to sit still and 36.7% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.” A total of 52% of heterosexual subjects responded, “nearly every day” or “over half the days” when asked not being able to stop or control worrying and 45.6% of LGBTQ subjects responded, “nearly every day or “over half the days.”

Table 4.8

Heterosexual Subjects Views Related to Handling Stress (N=152)
(Not at all sure=1, Several days=2, Over half the days=3, Nearly every day=4)

Variable	Not at all sure		Several Days		Over half the days		Nearly Everyday	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge. <i>M</i> =2.59 <i>SD</i> =1.025	28	18.4	38	25.0	53	34.9	33	21.7
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable. <i>M</i> =2.51 <i>SD</i> =0.956	25	16.4	49	32.3	53	34.9	25	16.4
Get discouraged. <i>M</i> =2.50 <i>SD</i> =0.99	30	19.7	40	26.4	57	37.5	25	16.4
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen. <i>M</i> =2.36 <i>SD</i> =0.761	13	8.6	83	54.5	43	28.3	13	8.6
Being so restless that it's hard to sit still. <i>M</i> =2.31 <i>SD</i> =0.849	19	12.5	85	55.9	29	19.1	19	12.5
Not being able to stop or control worrying. <i>M</i> =2.29 <i>SD</i> =0.975	35	9.8	58	38.2	38	38.2	21	13.8

Table 4.9

*LGBTQ Subjects Views Related to Handling Stress (N=90)**(Not at all sure=1, Several days=2, Over half the days=3, Nearly every day=4)*

Variable	Not at all sure		Several Days		Over half the days		Nearly Everyday	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable. <i>M</i> =2.46 <i>SD</i> =1.041	22	24.4	19	21.1	34	37.8	15	16.7
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge. <i>M</i> =2.42 <i>SD</i> =1.151	31	34.4	7	7.8	35	38.9	17	18.9
Get discouraged. <i>M</i> =2.41 <i>SD</i> =1.131	28	31.1	15	16.7	29	32.2	18	20.0
Not being able to stop or control worrying. <i>M</i> =2.32 <i>SD</i> =1.1	28	31.1	21	23.3	25	27.8	16	17.8
Being so restless that it's hard to sit still. <i>M</i> =2.14 <i>SD</i> =0.966	28	31.1	29	32.2	25	27.8	8	31.1
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen. <i>M</i> =2.07 <i>SD</i> =0.939	29	32.2	32	35.6	22	24.4	7	7.8

Research question 5. Is there a relationship between sexual orientation and how the students handle stress in their lives?

A Spearman correlation was conducted between subjects and their views on sexual orientation. Overall, data show that there is a correlation between sexual orientation and how students handle stress in their lives. The first four correlations are positive and weak, while the last two correlations are positive and moderate. A positive correlation between sexual orientation and subjects becoming easily annoyed or irritable shows that Sig. 2-tailed = 0.195, $p < 0.001$. Another positive correlation was discovered between sexual orientation and not being able to stop or control worrying, for data show that Sig. 2-tailed = 0.229, $p < 0.001$. For subjects who get discouraged, a positive correlation of Sig. 2-tailed = 0.231, $p < 0.001$ was discovered, displaying another positive correlation. Subjects who stated feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge shows a positive correlation of Sig. 2-tailed = 0.282, $p < 0.001$. A positive correlation between sexual orientation and subjects being so restless that it is hard to sit still shows that Sig. 2-tailed = 0.335, $p < 0.001$. For subjects who feel afraid as if something awful might happen, data shows that Sig. 2-tailed = 0.339, $p < 0.001$. These data indicate a significant relationship between the variables (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Significant Correlations Between Sexual Orientation and Stress (N=242)

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable.	0.195**	0.002
Not being able to stop or control worrying.	0.229**	0.000
Get discouraged.	0.231**	0.000
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge.	0.282**	0.000
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still.	0.335**	0.000
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.	0.339**	0.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study investigated student sexual identity development for upper class students at Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, in the 2017-2018 academic year. The study aimed to identify student views related to sexual orientation and their experiences and practices related to sexual orientation. Also probed was if there was a relationship between sexuality and how students handle stress. The study was also designed to analyze the impact of demographic variables such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and social class. The subjects in this study were upper class students who identified as Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors.

A survey was distributed to 242 students at Rowan University to answer to the best of their ability, with the option to opt out of the instrument at any time. The first part of the survey was designed to collect demographic data about the subjects. The second part was a 6 question Likert scale with additional items addressing sexual orientation awareness. The third part of the survey was a 6 question Likert scale and additional items addressing stress. A total of 242 completed surveys were anonymously returned, yielding a return rate of 100%. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and correlations were used to analyze the data from the completed surveys. Sexual orientation awareness and stress was explored using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Significant statistical differences were determined using the Spearman rho calculations.

Discussion of the Findings

Research question 1. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about their views related to sexual orientation?

The findings of the data revealed that subjects support LGBTQ students at Rowan University. According to literature, LGBTQ youth report experiencing homophobic harassment by school peers and occasionally administrators (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). However, subjects reported positive views related to sexual orientation, including their support for the right to same-sex marriage. The majority of subjects also felt more comfortable around LGBTQ individuals, a more positive view than their comfortability around transgender individuals. Majority of subjects also viewed homosexuality to not be a choice. In addition, subjects viewed positively that LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty. However, data revealed that subjects believed LGBTQ individuals are not treated as well with respect by peers. Though the agreement percentiles were in the positive range, there was a significant difference when asked if LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty. According to literature, administrators and faculty that work at these institutions have been making more of an attempt to create safe environments for their students through classroom discussions, programming, and social outlets (Kearns, Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014). As a course of action, faculty at higher education institutions such as Saint Francis Xavier University created a two-part series to educate others on LGBTQ awareness and how to create a safe space (Kearns et al., 2014).

Research question 2. Is there a relationship between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation?

Overall, there is no correlation between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation. Data show that one's sexual identity does not influence their views relating to sexual orientation topics. The lack of correlation is not a surprise, especially considering the data results of heterosexual subjects' views related to sexual orientation being similar to LGBTQ subjects' views related to sexual orientation. According to literature, LGBTQ students tend to experience the same biological, cognitive, and psychosocial tasks of heterosexual students. There has also been a minimal amount of research available on the student development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008). Because a study like this has not been conducted, the analysis can still be useful to Rowan University and in the field of higher education.

Research question 3. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students at Rowan University report about their experiences with policies and practices related to sexual orientation?

The findings of the data revealed that subjects reported a positive experience at Rowan University with their policies and practices. According to literature, any school board policies and curriculas emphasize the human rights of the students and embrace diversity, however, LGBTQ students feel unsafe, insulted or harassed on a daily basis. LGBTQ youth experience much of homophobia and transphobia in schools, however they do not see any administrators or faculty in leadership positions breaking this type of discrimination (Taylor et al., 2011). According to the data, there was a

significant difference in student experiences at Rowan University. Subjects reported positive views related to professors respecting preferred names and preferred pronouns on campus. The majority of subjects also felt that the inclusion of sexual orientation in official university materials about diversity and multiculturalism was frequently displayed. Data also revealed that students were familiar with LGBTQ issues and were comfortable using men only and female only restrooms. However, during the past year nearly half of the subjects did not attend a meeting at the SJICR, attend a LGBTQ oriented student event on campus, took a class about gender, nor took a class about sexuality.

Within recent years, administrators and faculty that work at higher education institutions have been making more of an attempt to create safe environments for LGBTQ students through classroom discussions, programming, and social outlets (Kearns, Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014). It is not only important to educate non-LGBTQ students about being inclusive and respectful to others, but also to educate LGBTQ students on how to combat homophobia and transphobia at a higher education institution (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, as a course of action, further programming and studies to explore the impact of training programs and practices to build awareness and allies at a higher education institution is important. Programs and initiatives that assists the acceleration of better learning communities for LGBTQ youth and allies at institutions can only increase experiences with policies and practices related to sexual orientation (Kearns et al., 2014).

Research question 4. What do selected sophomore, junior, and senior students report about how they handle stress in their lives?

Subjects were given six items related to handling stress in their lives and the findings of the data showed that majority of the subjects were feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge nearly every day or over half the days in a two-week period. According to Ertl and Quinn (2015), LGBTQ students are at a higher risk of experiencing social anxiety than heterosexual students. This distress is also linked to numerous negative consequences including lower grade point averages and higher rates of attrition (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). After a close analysis of heterosexual subjects and LGBTQ subjects reports of handling stress, it was determined that LGBTQ subjects are more likely to become easily annoyed or irritable than heterosexual subjects. Data also suggest that LGBTQ subjects are more likely to not stop or control worrying about issues in their lives. According to literature, these types of issues place students at risk for internalizing negative self-identity and homophobia. It can also lead to emotional distress, influence decision making around sexual behavior and substance use, anxiety, and depression (Ertl & Quinn, 2015). This distress is also linked to numerous negative consequences including lower grade point averages and higher rates of attrition (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Therefore, it is very important for students who identify as LGBTQ to find social support in a higher education institution environment. The experiences and behavioral patterns established during adolescence can influence adolescent health, which can greatly affect any long-term health trajectories of LGBTQ young adults (Ertl & Quinn, 2015).

Research question 5. Is there a relationship between sexual orientation and how the students handle stress in their lives?

A Spearman correlation was conducted between sexual orientation and how students handle stress in their lives, and overall data report that there is a correlation. Data showed that one's sexual orientation impacted subjects' ability to become easily annoyed or irritable. Another correlation suggests subjects are not able to stop or control worrying and can also be discouraged. Further data also supports a relationship between sexual orientation and students handling stress in their lives, for a positive correlation was displayed in: feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge, being so restless that it is hard to sit still, as well as feeling afraid as if something awful might happen. According to literature, a LGBTQ student may express feelings of depression, isolation, or substance abuse, all issues that stem from stress.

According to Kearns et al (2014), in order to assist a student, a school counselor must not assume that an LGBTQ student wants to discuss issues related to one's same-sex orientation. The extent of developmental, emotional, and psychosocial challenges faced by LGBTQ adolescents is overwhelming and may be difficult for school counselors to understand without conceptualizing the psychological and emotional struggles of these adolescents (Kearns et al., 2014). Counselors can also comprehensively examine the risk factors, stigmatization, and developmental issues facing LGBTQ students, offering practical interventions to aid school counselors to work effectively with students who attend a higher education institution (Bell & Thomas, 2007). Cass' model also serves as a conceptual foundation when counseling LGBTQ adolescents by offering an option to

assess which stage of development a student may be experiencing (Kearns, Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014).

Conclusions

This study was able to confirm previous findings about student sexual identity development at a higher education institution. The study was also able to focus on associated variables that may impact student success academically and socially. The study was able to help educators find solutions to promote student safety and LGBTQ awareness. The findings of the study revealed that subjects support LGBTQ students at Rowan University and reported positive views related to sexual orientation. Subjects reported that they support the right to same-sex marriage and felt comfortable around LGBTQ individuals. This type of support creates a safe space for sexual identity development and student growth. Data also show that there is no correlation between sexual orientation and views related to sexual orientation. There has been a minimal amount of research available to compare correlations, however these data can still be useful in the field of higher education.

A positive relationship between subject experiences and policies and practices related to sexual orientation was also determined through this study. In comparison to literature, data from the study reports that there was a significant difference in student experiences at Rowan University than other institutions. Subjects reported that professors respect preferred names and pronouns in classes. Subjects were also familiar with LGBTQ issues and reported to see the inclusion of sexual orientation in official university materials displayed frequently. The promotion of LGBTQ issues is helpful to assist handling stress in subjects' lives, for majority of the subjects reported feeling

nervous, anxious, or on edge near every day. This can impact a student's Sexual Identity Development, which illustrates the stages LGBTQ individuals move in to identify their sexuality and how they perform as a student academically and socially.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the researcher, the following suggestions for practice are presented:

1. Explore how to continue dialogue within Rowan University to promote inclusion initiatives.
2. Encourage Rowan University to create further policies to assist student issues that may occur on campus.
3. Explore ways to provide guidance for faculty and staff to create an inclusive environment in and outside of the classroom.
4. Create further educational opportunities for students to get involved with sexual orientation incentives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the researcher, the following suggestions for further research are presented:

1. Further studies should be conducted with larger student populations to confirm the findings in this study.
2. Use proper terminology for student identities, such as race and not ethnicity.
3. Provide definitions for terminology, for many students are not aware of LGBTQ terms.

4. Specific questions should be created to analyze the highs and lows of each subject's level of stress.
5. An additional study should be conducted to replicate this study with the same students to see if their anxiety has continued or halted.
6. This study should be conducted throughout the entire 2017 - 2018 academic year to analyze the consistency of each subject.

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Appendix A

Students and Sexual Orientation Survey

I am inviting you to participate in a research survey entitled “Students and Sexual Orientation: A Study of Students and Their Development at Higher Education Institutions.” You are included in this survey because you are an undergraduate student at Rowan University. In order to participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older. The survey may take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, then do not respond to this survey. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be 484.

The purpose of this research study is to gauge undergraduate students’ personal experiences of their student development, and if their sexual orientation influences their experiences. If students are having a negative experience on campus, do they feel the university is making acts to resolve any issues, or are students being marginalized. This survey is also a part of my thesis requirement for my master’s degree.

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

Subjects will be asked to identify and reflect on personal information involving sexual orientation and forms of anxiety. Some of the survey questions contains terminology that can be triggering to students. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand how faculty influence each other and students in regard to on-campus activism.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact me at boldend2@rowan.edu or my thesis advisor, Dr. Burton Sisco at sisco@rowan.edu but you do not have to give your personal identification.

In the first part of the questionnaire the researcher is going to ask a few statements about yourself.

1. What year in college are you?

1. Sophomore
2. Junior
3. Senior

2. What is your cumulative GPA in decimal format? _____

3. What is your ethnicity?

1. Black
2. White
3. Hispanic
4. Asian
5. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
6. American Indian or Alaska Native
7. Multiracial
8. Other (please specify) _____

4. What social class would you consider yourself as?

1. Upper Class
2. Middle Class
3. Lower Class

5. What is your age? _____ years old

6. Have you ever needed tutoring?

1. Yes
2. No

7. Would you say that you have many friends?

1. Yes
2. No

8. How often do you go to social events on or off campus?

1. Once a week
2. Two or more times a week
3. Once a month
4. Never

9. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. You may or may not be familiar with these terms. Please select the term you feel best applies to you.

1. Heterosexual
2. Gay
3. Lesbian
4. Homosexual
5. Bisexual
6. Queer
7. Pansexual
8. Other _____

10. Are you struggling with your sexual identity?

1. Yes
2. No

The second part of the questionnaire are statements relating to sexual orientation awareness. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by picking the answer closest to the way you feel about each statement. Choose your answers from the following 3 options: 1 = DISagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree

	1 DISagree	2 Neutral	3 Agree
1. I am comfortable around lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals.			
2. I support the right to same-sex marriage			
3. LGBTQ individuals are treated by respect by peers			
4. I am comfortable around transgender individuals			
5. Homosexuality is a choice			
6. LGBTQ individuals are treated with respect by faculty			

11. On a scale from 0-10, 10 being the most and 0 being the least favorable score, how satisfied are you with your experience at Rowan University? _____

12. During the past year, have you done any of the following? (Select all that apply.)

1. Attended a meeting at the SJICR in regard to sexual orientation
2. Attended an LGBTQ-oriented student event on campus
3. Took a class about gender
4. Took a class about sexuality

13. Do you feel comfortable telling other students your sexual orientation?

1. Yes
2. No

14. Do you feel your professor(s) respect your preferred name and preferred gender pronouns?

1. Yes
2. No

15. How familiar are you with LGBTQ issues?

1. Very familiar
2. Familiar
3. Somewhat familiar
4. Not very familiar
5. Not familiar at all

16. Do you see the inclusion of “sexual orientation” in official university materials about diversity and multiculturalism?

1. Yes
2. No

17. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their gender. Please select the term
or terms you feel best apply to you.

1. Woman
2. Man
3. Transgender
4. Intersex
5. Transsexual
6. Genderqueer
7. Other _____

18. How comfortable are you using men only and female only campus restrooms?

1. Very comfortable
2. Comfortable
3. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
4. Uncomfortable
5. Very uncomfortable

The third part of the questionnaire is focused on how you handle stress in your life. Please indicate how often you are bothered by the following problems when applying them to yourself. Choose your answers from the following 4 options: 0 = Not at all sure, 1 = Several days, 2 = Over half the days, and 3 = Nearly every day.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all sure 1	Several days 2	Over half the days 3	Nearly every day 4
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	1	2	3	4
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	1	2	3	4
3. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	1	2	3	4
4. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	1	2	3	4
5. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	1	2	3	4
6. Get discouraged	1	2	3	4

19. If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

1. Not difficult at all
2. Somewhat difficult
3. Very difficult
4. Extremely difficult

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey! If you have any questions or concerns about the survey please contact Dr. Burton Sisco at sisco@rowan.edu, (856)256-4500 x3717

Appendix B

Rowan University's eIRB Notice of Approval



** This is an auto-generated email. Please do not reply to this email message.
The originating e-mail account is not monitored.
If you have questions, please contact your local IRB office **

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance

Identifier: FWA00007111

IRB Chair Person: Harriet Hartman

IRB Director: Sreekant Murthy

Effective Date:

eIRB Notice of Approval

STUDY PROFILE

Study ID: [Pro2017001972](#)

Title: Students and Sexual Orientation: A Study of Students and Their Development at Higher Education Institutions

Principal Investigator:	Burton Sisco	Study Coordinator:	None
Co-Investigator(s):	Diamond Bolden	Other Study Staff:	There are no items to display
Sponsor:	Department Funded	Approval Cycle:	Not Applicable
Risk Determination:	Minimal Risk	Device Determination:	Not Applicable
Review Type:	Exempt	Exempt Category:	4
Subjects:	484		

CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

Submission Type:		Research Protocol/Study		Submission Status:		Approved	
Approval Date:		1/9/2018		Expiration Date:			
Pregnancy Code:		No Pregnant Women as Subjects		Pediatric Code:		No Children As Subjects	
				Prisoner Code:		No Prisoners As Subjects	
Protocol:		Survey Thesis Protocol		Consent:		There are no items to display	
				Recruitment Materials:		Survey Flyer Survey Email	

* Study Performance Sites:

Glassboro Campus College of Education, Rowan University

There are no items to display

ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
2. **Continuing Review:** Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
3. **Expiration of IRB Approval:** If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: **All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.**
4. **Amendments/Modifications/Revisions:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
5. **Unanticipated Problems:** Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>
6. **Protocol Deviations and Violations:** Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>

7. **Consent/Assent:** The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.

8. **Completion of Study:** Notify the IRB when your study has been stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor or the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application or final report.

9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.

10. **Letter Comments:** *There are no additional comments.*

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.

Appendix C

Flyer to Students

Want to Create

Contact Diamond Bolden at
boldend2@rowan.edu
or Dr. Burton Sisco at
sisco@rowan.edu

a Safer Community?

Come fill out a survey to address safety
and student identity on campus!

Requirements:

- Must be a resident of
Rowan Boulevard Apartments
- Must be 18 years of age

PosterMyWall.com

Appendix D

Email to Students

Dear Students,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Students and Sexual Orientation: A Study of Students and Their Development at Higher Education Institutions.” You are included in this survey because you are an undergraduate student at Rowan University. The number of subjects to be enrolled in this study will be 484 undergraduate students.

The survey may take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, then do not respond to this survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey. We expect the study to last until May 1, 2017. The purpose of this research study is to gauge undergraduate students’ personal experiences of their student development, and if their sexual orientation influences their experiences. If students are having a negative experience on campus, do they feel the university is making acts to resolve any issues, or are students being marginalized.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand how faculty influence each other and students in regard to on-campus activism. Your response will be kept anonymous. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information.

If you agree to participate in the survey or have any questions about the survey, you can contact me at boldend2@rowan.edu or my thesis advisor, Dr. Burton Sisco at sisco@rowan.edu but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Sincerely,

Diamond Bolden